# Research Brief

**Question: What is the impact of positive student/teacher relationships?**

**Summary of Findings:**

Research indicates that academic achievement and student behavior are influenced by the quality of teacher-student relationships (Jones, 2000). With increasing empirical attention in the literature, the teacher-student relationship has been identified as a significant influence on overall school and behavioral adjustment (e.g., Baker, Terry, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997), as well as positive school affect and attitude (e.g., Skinner & Belmont, 1993), academic achievement (e.g., Birch & Ladd, 1998) and motivation (e.g., Connell & Wellborn, 1991). Pianta and colleagues (Pianta & Steinberg, 1992; Pianta, Steinberg & Rollins, 1995) found that positive teacher-student relationships, defined as "warm, close, communicative," are linked to behavioral competence and better school adjustment.

Given that teacher-student relationships have a significant influence, how the relationships are shaped, and what determines the quality of those relationships are of great importance. Students show increased academic success, success throughout their school experience, and in preparation for becoming a global citizen when teachers model positive socialization skills.  Students who experience positive student-teacher relations are more likely to demonstrate adaptive classroom behaviors and academic success than their peers without these positive relationships with teachers (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta, 1999; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). There is evidence of positive associations between the quality of student-teacher relationship and students' academic achievement (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; O'Connor & McCartney, in press). Children who have overall higher quality relationships with their teachers have higher participation rates and engagement in the classroom than peers with lower quality relationships (Buhs, Ladd, & Herald, 2006; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999).
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**Prepare the Invitation: A Process To Develop Awareness of Behaviors**
When asked to describe a good teacher, students almost always say, "good teachers are caring" (Fisher, 2001). Students need and want positive teacher behavior to be associated with a blend of firmness along with warmth and caring. This process of building positive teacher-student relationship begins with a teacher who understands and exemplifies characteristics of a "healing teacher" (Phillips). In addition to understanding the curriculum around healing, a teacher must also envision what excellence would be for each student. A list of the characteristics is included in the resource list at the end of this brief.

It is also important to create inviting and comfortable classrooms. The use of an environmental checklist can support data collection and facilitate assessing classrooms.

This data will also help teachers make decisions about developing positive teacher-student relationships. The Michigan Department of Education provides a model (http://www.michigan.gov/documents/3-3_107241_7.pdf).

It is also important to be aware of things that a teacher does that make a difference in building positive teacher-student relationships. Many students enter school without ever having a successful relationship with a teacher.  If the intention of school is to impact students academically, there must be a real connection on a personal level.  To further develop the importance of teacher-student relationships, a short climate survey or other formalized assessment can be used as a part of a student, teacher, and relationship support program.  Such surveys provide data for school efforts to build stronger and more positive student-teacher relationships.

### Individualize Relationships

"Everyday millions of students arrive in American classrooms in search of more than academic preparation.  They are looking for someone "who will stop to heal a bruised heart or ego"(Jim Trelease).  Making connections and developing warm relationships with students requires that teachers must get to know each student on a personal level, investing time to gather information about each individual student. Knowing the students allows for mapping their preferences, styles and temperaments.  Gardner's Multiple Intelligences survey is a useful tool for gathering data and becoming more familiar with the learning style(s) of each student.  There are other modality and listening surveys (Carolyn Fine & Associates) that are useful as well. The personal student data can then inform the teaching and learning process and guide the teacher towards resources that will meet the diverse needs of the students both individually and collectively. Resources such as *Teaching with Love and Logic* (Jim Fay) and *The Healing Curriculum* (Gary Phillips) are just a few resources available to support the process of individualizing relationships.

### Develop A Conspiracy of Caring

*Tools for Teaching for Transformation* (Gary Phillips) suggest a major shift in educational thinking.  The task according to Phillips is to not only accommodate learner uniqueness but to accentuate it.  Teachers are expected to acknowledge and work with students by noting motivational and academic requirements. Having data about students' strengths and weaknesses increases the likelihood of developing successful student learning plans.

Creating a caring classroom can be implemented through deliberate use of strategies that work. A comprehensive list of strategies is included in the resource list. These strategies create an environment where students are invited to work in concert with the teacher to make the classroom inviting and a conducive to learning.   As the students engage in this process a transformation occurs – the classroom becomes a community of learners.

**Systematically Build Better Relationships**
Fisher (2001) suggests several strategies for building relationships. They include:
- Giving choices within limits
- Modeling self-acceptance
- Concentrating on the development of trust
- Understanding students' points of view
- Giving credibility to students' feelings.

A classroom environment that promotes positive teacher-student relationships starts with student involvement, clear expectations and rigor.  There are many methods and techniques that improve the quality of the learning environment.  Students need to feel wanted, valued, accepted and secure in an environment where they can interact with a caring teacher that they trust.  With this sensate culture in place there is a tone set for positive teacher-student relationships and improved student learning.

In *10 Subtle Ways to Create a Positive Learning Environment* (George Stratman of the San Diego County Office of Education (n.d.) provides a useful guide for positive teacher-student relationships:
- Use the student's names
- Catch them being good
- Dignify wrong answers
- Give students a second chance to answer correctly.
- Don't zap students
- Phrase your questions in a manner that is non-threatening
- Allow for thinking time
- Don't repeat answers
- Give the students choices

With teacher support and dedication to developing a "caring" environment, any classroom can be transformed into a positive learning environment. "Positive teacher-student relationships maximize the learning of every student and help children and youth become full participating citizens of society" (Positive Learning Environments in Schools, 2005).

**Print Resource:**

*What Students Want from Teachers.* Educational Leadership. Nov. 2008. Vol. 08. No. 3

**Online School Improvement Toolkit on Strengthening Teacher-Student Relationships:**

*Strengthening Student-Teacher Relationships*
http://www.michigan.gov/documents/3-3_107241_7.pdf
Michigan Department of Education Office of School Improvement has developed a Principal's training kit. This is one module in that kit. It establishes a process for raising awareness for strengthening teacher-student relationships.

*Knowing Your Students*
http://www.michigan.gov/documents/5-2_107267_7.pdf
This portion of the Michigan toolkit establishes a process for raising awareness for strengthening teacher-student relationships.

*School Improvement Toolkit*
http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-28753_33424---,00.html
This part of the toolkit provides strategies for getting to know students' styles and preferences.

**Other Online Resources:**

Block scheduling the high school: The effects on achievement, behavior, and student teacher relationships
Eineder and Bishop (1997). This article discussions how block scheduling can positively impact student-teacher relationships.

The concept and measurement of the quality of school life
This work represents a research study around measurement and meaning of the "Quality of School Life" for youngsters, their general satisfaction, or specific reactions to aspects of schools. Joyce Epstein and James M McPartland are the authors.

Intergenerational bonding in school: The behavioral and contextual correlates of student-teacher relationships
Study examines whether student-teacher relationships predicted two important student behavioral outcomes – academic achievement and disciplinary problems.

# The Principal's Partnership

http://www.principalspartnership.com/

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[Motivation in the classroom: Reciprocal effects of teacher behavior and student engagement across the school year](#)
The findings in this study suggest that student-teacher relationships, especially interpersonal involvement, optimize student motivation.

[The value of student-teacher relationships](#)
Read the full article at www.verticalthought.org/issues/ym03/relationships.htm
Reflection of author's high school days and how teacher-student relationships provided an environment that increased student learning.

[Be a teacher, you can make a difference: By America's Finest Teachers](#)
The goal of this book is to celebrate and elevate the teaching profession.

http://www.virginia.edu/vpr/CASTL/resources/srcd_2007_nathanson.pdf
This document outlines a review of the literature relating to the importance of student-teacher relationships and a student to further understand the unique contributions of child characteristics and teacher perceptions of student-teacher relationships.

Submitted  Date:  March 23, 2009.By: Ella M. Burton,  Eastern Michigan University. http://www.principalspartnership.com/

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